

REFERENCE DATABASE AND METHOD FOR DETERMINING SPECTRA
USING MEASUREMENTS FROM AN LED COLOR SENSOR, AND METHOD
OF GENERATING A REFERENCE DATABASE

INCORPORATION BY REFERENCE

Cross-reference and incorporation by reference are made to the following copending and commonly assigned U.S. patent applications and/or the following U.S. patents: U.S. Patent No. 6,584,435, U.S. Patent No. 6,587,793, U.S. Patent No. 6,556,932, U.S. Patent No. 6,449,045, U.S. Patent No. 6,556,300, U.S. Patent No. 6,567,170, U.S. Patent No. 6,621,576, U.S. Patent No. 6,603,551, co-pending, commonly assigned U.S. Patent Application No. 09/941,858

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of Invention

[0001] This invention relates to a reference database usable for determining spectra based on non-spectral inputs.

2. Description of Related Art

[0002] Automatic on-line color calibration systems can be much more effective with an on-line color measurement system where a spectrophotometer may be mounted in the paper path of the moving copy sheets in the printer, preferably in the output path after fusing or drying, without having to otherwise modify the printer, or interfere with or interrupt normal printing, or the movement of the printed sheets in said paper path, and yet provide accurate color measurements of test color patches printed on the moving sheets as they pass the spectrophotometer. That enables a complete closed loop color control of a printer.

[0003] . A typical spectrophotometer gives color information in terms of measured reflectances or transmittances of light, at the different wavelengths of light, from the test surface. This spectrophotometer desirably provides distinct electric signals corresponding to the different levels of reflected light received from the respective different illumination wavelength ranges or channels.

[0004] Known devices capable of providing distinct electric signals corresponding to the different levels of reflected light received from the respective different illumination wavelength ranges or channels include a grating-based spectrophotometer made by Ocean Optics Inc., LED based sensors marketed by

“ColorSavvy” or Accuracy Microsensor; and other spectrophotometers by Gretag MacBeth (Viptronic), ExColor, and X-Rite (DTP41). However, those devices are believed to have significant cost, measurement time, target displacement errors, and/or other difficulties, for use in real-time printer on-line measurements.

[0005] As used herein, unless otherwise specifically indicated, the term "spectrophotometer" may encompass a spectrophotometer, colorimeter, and densitometer, as broadly defined herein. The definition or use of such above terms may vary or differ among various scientists and engineers. However, the following is an attempt to provide some simplified clarifications relating and distinguishing the respective terms "spectrophotometer," "colorimeter," and "densitometer," as they may be used in the specific context of specification examples of providing components for an on-line color printer color correction system, but not necessarily as claim limitations.

[0006] A typical "spectrophotometer" measures the reflectance of an illuminated object of interest over many light wavelengths. Typical prior spectrophotometers in this context use 16 or 32 channels measuring from 380 nm to 730 nm or so, to cover the humanly visible color spectra or wavelength range. A typical spectrophotometer gives color information in terms of measured reflectances or transmittances of light, at the different wavelengths of light, from the test surface. (This is to measure more closely to what the human eye would see as a combined image of a broad white light spectra image reflectance, but the spectrophotometer desirably provides distinct electrical signals corresponding to the different levels of reflected light from the respective different illumination wavelength ranges or channels.)

[0007] A "colorimeter" normally has three illumination channels, red, green and blue. That is, generally, a "colorimeter" provides its three (red, green and blue or “RGB”) values as read by a light sensor or detector receiving reflected light from a color test surface sequentially illuminated with red, green and blue illuminators, such as three different color LEDs or one white light lamp with three different color filters. It may thus be considered different from, or a limited special case of, a "spectrophotometer," in that it provides output color information in the trichromatic quantity known as RGB.

[0008] Trichromatic quantities may be used for representing color in three coordinate space through some type of transformation. Other RGB conversions to "device independent color space" (i.e., RGB converted to conventional $L^*a^*b^*$) typically use a color conversion transformation equation or a "lookup table" system in a known manner.

[0009] A "densitometer" typically has only a single channel, and simply measures the amplitude of light reflectivity from the test surface, such as a developed toner test patch on a photoreceptor, at a selected angle over a range of wavelengths, which may be wide or narrow. A single illumination source, such as an IR LED, a visible LED, or an incandescent lamp, may be used. The output of the densitometer detector is programmed to give the optical density of the sample. A densitometer of this type is basically "color blind." For example, a cyan test patch and magenta test patch could have the same optical densities as seen by the densitometer, but, of course, exhibit different colors.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0010] A multiple LED reflectance spectrophotometer, as in the examples of the embodiments herein, may be considered to belong to a special class of spectrophotometers which normally illuminate the target with narrow band or monochromatic light. Others, with wide band illumination sources, can be flashed Xenon lamp spectrophotometers, or incandescent lamp spectrophotometers. A spectrophotometer is normally programmed to give more detailed reflectance values by using *more* than 3 channel measurements (for example, 10 or more channel measurements), with conversion algorithms. That is in contrast to normal three channel colorimeters, which cannot give accurate, human eye related, reflectance spectra measurements, because they have insufficient measurements for that (only 3 measurements).

[0011] It is desirable for a printer color control system to dynamically measure the color of test patches on the printed output media "on line", that is, while the media is still in the sheet transport or paper path of a print engine, for real-time and fully automatic printer color correction applications.

[0012] For a low cost implementation of the color sensor, a multiple illuminant device is used as the illumination source, and has, for example, 8, 10, 12 or 16 LEDs. Each LED is selected to have a narrow band response curve in the

spectral space. Therefore, for example, ten LEDs would correspond to ten measurements in the reflectance curve. The LEDs, or other multiple illuminant based color sensor equivalent, e.g., lasers, are switched on one at a time as, for example, the measured media is passed through a transport of a printer. The reflected light is then detected by a photodetector and the corresponding voltage integrated and normalized with a white tile.

[0013] To obtain a smooth curve similar to that of a Gretag spectrophotometer, linear or cubic spline algorithms could be used, which blindly interpolate the data points without knowledge of the color space. Unfortunately, due to lack of measurements at wavelengths below 430nm and above 660nm (due to lack of LEDs at these wavelengths), extrapolation with 10 measurements can lead to errors.

[0014] U.S. Patent No. 6,584,435, U.S. Patent No. 6,587,793, U.S. Patent No. 6,556,932, and U.S. Patent No. 6,449,045 collectively disclose various systems and methods for using the integrated sensor measurements to determine a fully populated reflectance spectra with reflectance values at specific wavelengths. Those methods and systems use a reference database in determining the spectra, and convert integrated multiple illuminant measurements from a non-fully illuminant populated color sensor into a fully populated spectral curve. As described collectively in these disclosures, the reference database is generated by measuring the reflectance spectra of some set of reference colors, with an accurate reference spectrophotometer, such as a Gretag spectrophotometer, and their corresponding LED sensor outputs, with the sensor array of a given color measuring device. In general, the more densely populated the database is, i.e., the more reference colors used, the better the resulting accuracy. Furthermore, even spacing of the reference colors in the color space gives greater accuracy. The data stored in the reference database will be referred to hereafter as the training samples.

[0015] This invention relates to a reference database usable with the above-described systems, and a method for constructing the reference database, and a method of using the reference database to obtain a spectral curve. In embodiments, the database is partitioned into a plurality of clusters, and an appropriate centroid is determined for each cluster. In embodiments, the centroids are obtained by vector quantization. The training samples may be assigned to the clusters by comparing the

Euclidean distance between the centroids and the sample under consideration, and assigning each sample to the cluster having the centroid with the shortest Euclidean distance. When all training samples have been assigned, the resulting structure is stored as the reference database.

[0016] In embodiments, when reconstructing the spectra for new measurements from the sensor, the Euclidean distances between actual color samples under measurement and each cluster centroid are measured. The spectra are then reconstructed using only the training samples from the cluster corresponding to the shortest Euclidean distance. By thus using only a limited number of the total training samples, the speed and accuracy of the spectral reconstruction is enhanced.

[0017] These and other objects, advantages and salient features of the invention are described in or apparent from the following description of exemplary embodiments.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0018] Exemplary embodiments of the invention will be described with reference to the drawings, wherein like numerals represent like parts, and wherein:

[0019] Fig. 1 is a functional block diagram illustrating an exemplary embodiment of a coloring system according to the invention;

[0020] Fig. 2 is a flowchart illustrating an exemplary method of obtaining centroids for a reference database according to this invention;

[0021] Fig. 3 is a flowchart illustrating an exemplary method of generating clusters for a reference database according to this invention;

[0022] Fig. 4 illustrates an exemplary reference database according to this invention;

[0023] Fig. 5 is a flowchart illustrating an exemplary method of determining spectra according to this invention; and

[0024] Fig. 6 is a functional block diagram illustrating an exemplary embodiment of a color detection system according to this invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0025] A spectrophotometer according to the invention is a spectrophotometer especially suitable for being mounted at one side of the printed sheets output path of a color printer to optically evaluate color imprinted output sheets as they move past the spectrophotometer, variably spaced therefrom, without having to contact the sheets or interfere with the normal movement of the sheets. In particular, it may be used to measure a number of color test patch samples printed by the printer on actual printed sheet output of the printer during regular or selected printer operation intervals (between normal printing runs or print jobs). These color test sheet printing intervals may be at regular timed intervals, and/or at each machine "cycle-up," or as otherwise directed by the system software. The spectrophotometer may be mounted at one side of the paper path of the machine, or, if it is desired to use duplex color test sheets, two spectrophotometers may be mounted on opposite sides of the paper path.

[0026] Relatively frequent color calibration of a color printer is highly desirable, since the colors actually printed on the output media (as compared to the colors intended to be printed) can significantly change, or drift out of calibration over time, for various known reasons. For example, changes in the selected or loaded print media, such as differences paper or plastic sheet types, materials, weights, calendaring, coating, humidity, etc., or changes in the printer's ambient conditions, changes in the image developer materials, aging or wear of printer components, varying interactions of different colors being printed, etc. Printing test color patches on test sheets of the same print media under the same printing conditions during the same relative time periods as the color print job being color-controlled is thus very desirable.

[0027] It is thus also advantageous to provide dual-mode color test sheets, in which multiple color patches of different colors are printed on otherwise blank areas of each, or selected, banner, cover, or other inter-document or print job separator sheets. Different sets of colors may be printed on different banner or other test sheets. This dual use of such sheets saves both print paper and printer utilization time, and also provides frequent color calibration opportunities where the printing system is one in which banner sheets are being printed at frequent intervals anyway.

[0028] An additional feature which can be provided is to tailor or set the particular colors or combinations of the test patches on a particular banner or other test sheet to those colors which are about to be printed on the specific document for that banner sheet, i.e., the document pages which are to be printed immediately subsequent to that banner sheet (the print job identified by that banner sheet). This can provide a "real time" color correction for the color printer which is tailored to correct printing of the colors of the very next document to be printed.

[0029] The preferred implementations of the systems and features disclosed herein may vary depending on the situation. Also, various of the disclosed features or components may be alternatively used for such functions as gray scale balancing, turning on more than one illumination source at once, such as oppositely positioned LEDs, etc.

[0030] It will be appreciated that these test patch images and colors may be automatically sent to the printer imager from a stored data file specifically designed for printing the dual mode banner sheet or other color test sheet page, and/or they may be embedded inside the customer job containing the banner page. That is, the latter may be directly electronically associated with the electronic document to be printed, and/or generated or transmitted by the document author or sender. Because the printed test sheet color patches colors and their printing sequence is known (and stored) information, the on-line spectrophotometer measurement data therefrom can be automatically coordinated and compared.

[0031] After the spectrophotometer or other color sensor reads the colors of the test patches, the measured color signals may be automatically processed inside the system controller or the printer controller to produce or modify the tone reproduction curve, as explained in the cited references. The color test patches on the next test sheet may then be printed with that new tone reproduction curve. This process may be repeated so as to generate further corrected tone reproduction curves. If the printer's color image printing components and materials are relatively stable, with only relatively slow long term drift, and there is not a print media or other abrupt change, the tone reproduction curve produced using this closed loop control system will be the correct curve for achieving consistent colors for at least one or even a substantial number of customer print jobs printed thereafter, and only relatively infrequent and few color test sheets, such as the normal banner sheets, need be printed.

[0032] In addition to use in printers, it should be noted that color measurements, and/or the use of color measurements for various quality or consistency control functions, are also important for many other different technologies and applications, such as in the production of textiles, wallpaper, plastics, paint, inks, food products, etc. and in the measurement or detection of various properties of various materials, objects or substances. Thus, the invention may have applications in various such other fields where these materials, objects or substances are to be color tested, including both (1) applications in which color measurements are taken and applied in a closed loop control system and (2) applications in which the measurement result is not fed back into a control loop, but is used to generate a one-time output.

[0033] Fig. 1 is a functional block diagram illustrating an exemplary embodiment of a coloring system 100 according to this invention. The coloring system 100 is connected to an input device 200 via a link 210. The input device 200 inputs various information needed to implement the operations of the coloring system 100, as described in more detail below, and may include a mouse, a keyboard, a touch-screen input device, a voice recognition-based input device, and/or any other known or later developed device usable for inputting information. The coloring system 100 optionally is connected to an image data source 300 via a link 310. The connection to the image data source 300 is "optional" because it is required only for certain embodiments of the coloring system 100.

[0034] For example, when the coloring system 100 is a marking device, such as a printer, the image data source 300 is required. However, when the coloring system 100 is a system for performing a coloring operation that does not require image data, the image data source 300 is not required. An example of a coloring operation that may not require image data is an operation of making a colored food product such as cereal or the like.

[0035] The image data source 300 can be a digital camera, a scanner, or a locally or remotely located computer, or any other known or later developed device that is capable of generating electronic image data. Similarly, the image data source 300 can be any suitable device that stores and/or transmits electronic image data, such as a client or a server of a network. The image data source 300 can be integrated with the coloring system 100, as in a digital copier having an integrated scanner. Alternatively, the image data source 300 can be connected to the coloring system 100

over a connection device, such as a modem, a local area network, a wide area network, an intranet, the Internet, any other distributed processing network, or any other known or later developed connection device.

[0036] It should also be appreciated that, while the electronic image data can be generated at the time of printing an image from an original physical document, the electronic image data could have been generated at any time in the past. Moreover, the electronic image data need not have been generated from the original physical document, but could have been created from scratch electronically. The image data source 300 is thus any known or later developed device which is capable of supplying electronic image data over the link 310 to the coloring system 100. The link 310 can thus be any known or later developed system or device for transmitting the electronic image data from the image data source 300 to the coloring system 100.

[0037] Further, it should be appreciated that the links 210 and 310 can be a wired, wireless or optical link to a network (not shown). The network can be a local area network, a wide area network, an intranet, the Internet, or any other distributed processing and storage network.

[0038] The coloring system 100 includes a coloring device 120, a sensor array 130, a color revision device 140, a memory 150, a controller 160 and a spectral curve determination system 170, which are interconnected by a data/control bus 190. The spectral curve determination system 170 includes a reference database 172 and a spectral curve output device 174.

[0039] The coloring device 120 may be, for example, a print engine/printing head or marking engine/marking head, when the coloring system 100 is a printer or other marking device. The coloring device 120 may be, for example, a colorant dispenser that dispenses a colorant onto an object or into a mixture. U.S. Patent No. 6,603,551, incorporated herein by reference in its entirety, discusses various applications for color measurement and/or adjustment, including textiles and/or textile manufacturing, and the coloring system 100 may, for example, be applied in any of these applications. Thus, the coloring device 120 may be any known or later developed device that directly or indirectly controls the final appearance of an object, material or substance.

[0040] The sensor array 130 includes multiple illuminants, such as LEDs, lasers or the like, arranged around a central photodetector (not shown), or arranged in

correspondence to a plurality of photodetectors or photosites as described in, for example, U.S. Application No. U.S. Patent No. 6,556,300, U.S. Patent No. 6,567,170 and/or U.S. Patent No. 6,621,576. The illuminants will be referred to hereafter as LEDs for convenience. The number of LEDs may be any number greater than three, when a single photosensor is used, or may be as low as two when multiple photosites or photosensors are used. A larger number of LEDs gives greater accuracy, but it costs more to include more LEDs, and thus there are practical limits to the number of LEDs included in the sensor array 130, especially since an object of this invention is to provide a low-cost spectrophotometer. Therefore, the number of LEDs is preferably from about 8 to about 16.

[0041] Each LED is selected to have a narrow band response curve in the spectral space. Therefore, for example, ten LEDs would correspond to ten measurements in the reflectance curve. The LEDs, or other multiple illuminant based color sensor equivalent, e.g., lasers, are switched on one at a time as, for example, the measured media is passed through a transport of a printer. The reflected light is then detected by the photodetector and the corresponding voltage integrated and normalized with a white tile. The normalization may be performed periodically. For the normalization, use of a white tile calibration look-up table, which is stored in memory 150, is a standard practice in the color measurement industry. When the white tile calibration look-up table is used, the detector output is normalized to between 0 to 1 in accordance with, for example, the following equation:

$$V_{m_i} = (V_i - V_i^o) R_i^w / (V_i^{fs} - V_i^o), \quad \dots(1)$$

where V_i^o is the black measurement sensing system offset of the i^{th} LED, V_i^{fs} is the white tile measurements, V_i is the sensor detector output, and R_i^w is the reflectance spectra of the white tile at the mean wavelength of the i^{th} LED. Any other known or later developed method for normalization may alternatively be used. V_{m_i} may be compensated for temperature variation.

[0042] The color revision device 140 calibrates the output of the coloring device 120 in accordance with information obtained from the spectral curve output device 174 of the spectral curve determination system 170. This calibration may be

performed as often as necessary or desired to maintain a desirable output of the coloring device 120.

[0043] The memory 150 may serve as a buffer for information coming into or going out of the coloring system 100, may store any necessary programs and/or data for implementing the functions of the coloring system 100, and/or may store data at various stages of processing. The above-mentioned white tile lookup table may be stored in the memory 150 if desired. The reference database 172, described in more detail below, may also be stored in the memory 150 if desired. Furthermore, it should be appreciated that the memory 150, while depicted as a single entity, may actually be distributed. Alterable portions of the memory 150 are, in various exemplary embodiments, implemented using static or dynamic RAM. However, the memory 150 can also be implemented using a floppy disk and disk drive, a writeable optical disk and disk drive, a hard drive, flash memory or the like. The generally static portions of the memory 150 are, in various exemplary embodiments, implemented using ROM. However, the static portions can also be implemented using other non-volatile memory, such as PROM, EPROM, EEPROM, an optical ROM disk, such as a CD-ROM or DVD-ROM, and disk drive, flash memory or other alterable memory, as indicated above, or the like.

[0044] The controller 160 controls the operation of other components of the coloring system 100, performs any necessary calculations and executes any necessary programs for implementing the processes of the coloring system 100 and its individual components, and controls the flow of data between other components of the coloring system 100 as needed.

[0045] The spectral curve determination system 170 determines and outputs spectral curves. Specifically, the spectral curve output device 174 outputs spectral curves based on a plurality of spectra which are determined by the controller 160 based on information from the reference database 172, described in more detail below, and the output of the sensor array 130 from different color targets.

[0046] To obtain an output similar to that of a reference spectrophotometer, such as a Gretag spectrophotometer, it is necessary to convert the readings from the sensory array 130 to reflectance spectra. A Gretag spectrophotometer outputs 36 spectral reflectance values, evenly spaced at 10nm over the visible spectrum (e.g., 380 nm to 730 nm). Therefore, in the following examples, the readings from the sensor

array 130 are converted to 36 reflectance values. In other words, when there are 8 LEDs in the sensor array 130, the LEDs are sequentially switched, readings (typically voltage readings) are collected from the photodetector for each respective LED, and the 8 readings (voltages) from the sensor array 130 are converted to 36 reflectance values per color. If a multiple photosite sensor is used, it will be appreciated that a desired number of outputs, for example 8 outputs, will be obtained from smaller number of LEDs, for example 3 or 4 LEDs. An X-Rite spectrophotometer has 31 outputs evenly spaced at 10nm over the spectrum of 400 nm to 700 nm, so in the case of an X-Rite spectrophotometer the readings from the sensor array 130 are converted to 31 reflectance values.

[0047] It will be understood that each of the circuits shown in Fig. 1 can be implemented as portions of a suitably programmed general purpose computer. Alternatively, each of the circuits shown in Fig. 1 can be implemented as physically distinct hardware circuits within an ASIC, or using a FPGA, a PDL, a PLA or a PAL, or using discrete logic elements or discrete circuit elements. The particular form each of the circuits shown in Fig. 1 will take is a design choice and will be obvious and predictable to those skilled in the art.

[0048] The reference database 172 is generated by measuring the reflectance spectra of some set of reference colors, with an accurate reference spectrophotometer, such as a Gretag spectrophotometer, and their corresponding LED sensor outputs, with the sensor array 130. In general, the more densely populated the database is, i.e., the more reference colors used, the better the resulting accuracy. In one exemplary reference database, about 5000 colors are used. Furthermore, even spacing of the reference colors in the color space gives greater accuracy. The data stored in the reference database 172 will be referred to hereafter as the training samples.

[0049] First, the sensor transfer function, i.e., the information included in the reference database 172, is a mapping from reflectance spectra (as measured by a reference spectrophotometer) to sensor outputs (as measured by the sensor array 130) formed by a set of N spectra to voltage measurements, denoted as

$$\Omega = [S_1 \ S_2 \ \dots \ S_N] \in R^{n \times N} \longrightarrow V = [V_1 \ V_2 \ \dots \ V_N] \in R^{l \times N} \quad \dots(2)$$

where $S_1 S_2 \dots S_N$ are the vector elements containing the N spectral curves, each curve containing 36 elements, i.e., reflectance values ($n = 36$), and $V_1 V_2 \dots V_N$ are the vector elements from the LED sensor outputs (in volts), each having ten components ($l = 8$) when an 8-LED spectrophotometer is used. Here, each curve contains 36 elements because a Gretag spectrophotometer, which outputs 36 values, is used. If a different spectrophotometer is used which has a different number of outputs, n will be a correspondingly different number. $V_1 V_2 \dots V_N$ are each a vector including 8 normalized voltages corresponding to the 8 LED color sensor outputs for a given color. R indicates the set of real numbers. N is a predetermined number based on certain color gamut specifications for the color sensor array 130. Generally, the larger the gamut, the larger will be N . As an example, N may be about 5000.

[0050] The value of l discussed above depends on the number of sensor outputs, which may be the number of illuminants, e.g., the number of LEDs. However, it will be appreciated that when a multiple photosite sensor is used, l will not be equal to the number of LEDs.

[0051] Using a cell division algorithm, such as the one described in detail below, the reference database 172 is partitioned into cells, Ω_k for $k=1, 2, 3, \dots, N_k$ as follows:

$$\Omega_k = [S_{1_k} S_{2_k} \dots S_{N_k}] \in R^{n \times N_k} \longrightarrow Z_k = [C_k V_{1_k} V_{2_k} \dots V_{N_k}] \in R^{l \times N_k} \quad \dots(3)$$

where $S_{1_k} S_{2_k} \dots S_{N_k}$ are the vector elements containing the N_k spectral curves which is the output of the cell division algorithm, each curve containing 36 elements, i.e., reflectance values $n=36$, if a spectrophotometer with 36 outputs, such as a Gretag spectrophotometer, is used for obtaining the training samples for the reference database 172, $V_{1_k} V_{2_k} \dots V_{N_k}$ are the vector elements from the normalized LED sensor outputs, each having 8 components ($l=8$) when an 8-LED spectrophotometer is used for color measurement, C_k is the centroid of the voltages in a k th cell, and R indicates the set of real numbers.

[0052] In the following description, K is the total number of cells into which the reference database 172 is ultimately divided, and N is a predetermined number representing the total number of color samples in the complete reference database 172. The relationship between K and N is as follows:

$$N = \sum_{k=1}^K N_k \quad \dots(4)$$

[0053] Exemplary algorithms for partitioning the reference database 172 will be described with reference to Figs. 2-3.

[0054] Fig. 2 is a flowchart illustrating a method of determining centroids. These centroids will become the centers of the respective clusters of the partitioned database. Beginning in step S1000, the process continues to step S1050, where N training samples V_1, V_2, \dots, V_N are entered from the reference database that is to be partitioned. Various values are entered, including ϵ, K, m, D^0, i , and E . ϵ is a distortion threshold, which indicates the maximum allowable distortion, as defined, e.g., directly by the user, by a preset default, or based on some other criterion associated with desired system performance. K is the number of clusters into which the database is to be partitioned, and may be arbitrary or based on any desired criteria. The larger K is, the better the result obtained from the reference base, but it will be appreciated that processing time will also increase in proportion to K . One example of a suitable value for K is 10. m, D^0, i , and E are values used in the algorithm. Specifically, m and i are simply iteration counters, as will be appreciated from the flowchart, and may be initially set at 0 and 1, respectively. D^0 is an initial distortion setting, and is set at an arbitrary large positive number, such as 1000. E is a distortion value, which is initially set at 0.

[0055] Additionally, empty sets A_1, A_2, \dots, A_K are established. These are the clusters of the database, which will be filled with initial values and then updated until certain criteria are met, as described below. Initial cluster centroids C^0 are set equal to C_k , where $k = 1, 2, \dots, K$. Thus, one centroid C_k is assigned to each empty set. The centroids C_k may be arbitrary, or may be set using a "best guess" based on previous experience.

[0056] The process continues to step S1100 where, for each training sample V_i , expressed as a voltage vector, the Euclidean distance d to each cluster centroid C_k is determined, and from the Euclidean distances d the cluster A_j having the minimum Euclidean distance is identified as follows:

$$J = \arg \min_k D = \arg \min_k d(V_i, C_k) \quad \dots(5)$$

[0057] Then, in step S1150, V_i is accumulated into A_j . Next, in step S1200, the distortion E is determined by

$$E = E + D_{\min} \quad \dots(6)$$

where D_{\min} is the minimum distortion value d obtained in step S1100.

[0058] Steps S1250 and S1300 perform an incrementation of i , and steps S1100 through S1200 are repeated such that the next training sample V_i is considered and accumulated into the appropriate cluster A_j . This cycle is repeated until all training samples have been accumulated into an appropriate cluster. When $i=N$ in step S1250, i.e., when all training samples have been accumulated, the process continues to step S1350.

[0059] In step S1350, an updated cluster centroid C_k is determined for each cluster A_1, A_2, \dots, A_k . This determination may be performed according to the following equation:

$$C_k = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{L_k} A_k(i)}{L_k} \quad \dots(7)$$

where L_k is the number of vectors in A_k .

[0060] In step S1400, the average distortion D^m is obtained by:

$$D^m = \frac{E}{N} \quad \dots (8)$$

Then, in step S1450, it is determined whether distortion is within the distortion threshold ε . This determination may be made by determining whether the following relation is satisfied:

$$\frac{D^{m-1} - D^m}{D^m} \leq \varepsilon \quad \dots(9)$$

[0061] If the relation (9) is not satisfied, the process continues to step S1500, sets $E=0$ and $m=m+1$, and repeats steps S1100 through S1450, beginning this time with the updated cluster centroids C_k . When the relation (9) is satisfied, the process jumps to step S1550 and stores the centroids C_1, C_2, \dots, C_k .

[0062] The centroids stored in step S1550 are the "final" centroids that will be used in the partitioned reference database. After these centroids are stored, a final step of accumulating the training samples into the appropriate clusters may be performed, as described next. Continuing to step S1600, the program goes to step S2000 of Fig.

3, and initializes by inputting the cluster centroids C_k , where $k = 1, 2, \dots, K$, where K is the number of clusters, and by establishing empty sets A_1, A_2, \dots, A_K . i is set initially at 1.

[0063] Continuing to step S2100, training samples V_1, V_2, \dots, V_N are entered. The following steps S2200 and S2300 are identical to steps S1100 and S1150, respectively, of Fig. 2, and thus each training sample V_i is accumulated into the appropriate cluster, i.e., the cluster having the centroid with the shortest Euclidean distance from the training sample.

[0064] The following steps S2400 and S2500 are identical to steps S1250 and S1300, respectively, of Fig. 2, and thus an incrementation/loop is performed such that steps S2200 and S2300 are repeated and the next training sample V_i is considered and accumulated into the appropriate cluster A_j . This cycle is repeated until all training samples have been accumulated into an appropriate cluster. When $i=N$ in step S2400, i.e., when all training samples have been accumulated, the process continues to step S2600, stores the clusters A_1, A_2, \dots, A_N and then ends in step S2700.

[0065] The steps from S1100 to S1500 of Fig. 2 define a process known as vector quantization, and also known as a "K-Means algorithm" or "Lind-Buzo-Gray algorithm."

[0066] Fig. 4 illustrates an exemplary reference database according to this invention. In Fig. 4, "Cluster 1", "Cluster 2", ... "Cluster K" correspond respectively to " A_1 ", " A_2 ", ... " A_K " of Fig. 3.

[0067] Exemplary algorithms that may be implemented by the controller 160 for determining spectra based on the reference database 172 and the output of the sensor array 130 are described in co-pending U.S. Patent Application No. 09/941,858, entitled SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR DETERMINING SPECTRA USING DYNAMIC LEAST SQUARES ALGORITHMS WITH MEASUREMENTS FROM LED COLOR SENSOR, and in U.S. Patent No. 6,584,435 and U.S. Patent No. 6,587,793, each of which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety. An algorithm is described below in which interaction with the reference database is more specifically described. It should be appreciated that any of the above-mentioned algorithms may be implemented within the algorithm described below, or that the algorithm described below may be implemented independently of any of the above-mentioned algorithms. Those skilled in the art will understand how, for example, to

implement the algorithm described below in conjunction with any of the above-mentioned algorithms. It has been found that it is particularly effective, from the standpoint of processing speed and accuracy, when the algorithm described below is implemented in connection with the algorithm disclosed in the above-mentioned U.S. Patent Application No. 09/941,858.

[0068] In the following description, the number of LEDs included in the sensor array 130 is assumed to be 8. Those skilled in the art will appreciate how to apply the algorithm to sensor arrays with more or fewer LEDs.

[0069] Furthermore, it should be appreciated in this context that, in general, algorithms applicable to generation of a tone reproduction curve are not applicable to generation of a spectral curve. One reason for this is that, while the first and last values in a tone reproduction curve are known (i.e., they are [0,0] and [255, 255]), the same cannot be said of spectral curves generated using LED sensors, because the LEDs at the opposite ends of the spectrum (i.e., the blue and red LEDs) are not monochromatic.

[0070] Fig. 5 is a flowchart illustrating an exemplary method of determining spectra according to this invention, using the partitioned database obtained as described above. Beginning in step S3000, the process continues to step S3100, where training samples are entered from the reference database. Next, in step S3200, a sensor reading is received from each illuminant in a sensor array. Continuing to step S3300, the sensor readings are normalized, and compensated for temperature if necessary or desired. It should be appreciated that steps S3100 through S3300 are similar to steps performed in, for example, methods described in the above-referenced co-pending U.S. Patent Application No. 09/941,858, and/or other ones of the documents incorporated by reference above. The process then continues to step S3400.

[0071] In step S3400, a Euclidean distance from the current color sample to each cluster centroid is determined, and it is determined which of these Euclidean distances is the shortest. Then, in step S3500, a spectrum is determined based only on the training samples from the cluster having the centroid with the shortest Euclidean distance.

[0072] Continuing to step S3600, it is determined whether all color samples have been measured. If not all the color samples have been measured, the process continues to step S3700. Otherwise, the process jumps to step S3800.

[0073] In step S3700, the next color sample is selected. Steps S3200 - S3600 are then repeated. When all color samples have been measured, the process goes to step S3800 and outputs the full reflectance spectra, i.e., the spectral curve, of the color samples. Finally, the process ends in step S1900.

[0074] Fig. 6 is a functional block diagram illustrating an exemplary embodiment of a color detection system 500 according to this invention. The color detection system 500 includes an input/output interface 110, a sensor array 130, a controller 150, a memory 160 and a reference database 172, which may be identical to the corresponding elements of Fig. 1, interconnected by a data/control bus 590. The color detection system 500 is connected to a user input device 200 via a link 210, similar to the input device 200 and link 210 described above in conjunction with Fig. 1. The color detection system 500 is also connected to a data sink 400 via a link 410 which, like the links 210 and 310, can be a wired, wireless or optical link to a network (not shown). In general, the data sink 400 can be any device that is capable of outputting or storing the processed data generated by the color detection system, such as a printer, a copier or other image forming devices, a facsimile device, a display device, a memory, or the like.

[0075] The color detection system 500 may be, or be included in, a portable or stationary unit designed specifically to measure color of a target object. In use, the color detection system 500 is positioned with the sensor array 130 facing the target object, the sensor array 130 is activated as described above, and then the above-described algorithm is executed by the controller 150, using data from the sensor array 130 and the reference database 172, to obtain an estimated spectrum of the target object. The estimated spectrum is then output to the data sink 400.

[0076] From the foregoing descriptions, it can be appreciated that, in embodiments, the invention may provide a calibration tool for scanners, printers, digital photocopiers, etc., and that, in embodiments, the invention may provide a color measurement tool designed to provide one-time color measurements of target objects.

[0077] The coloring system 100 of Fig. 1 and the color detection system 500 of Fig. 6 are preferably implemented either on a single program general purpose computer or separate programmed general purpose computer, with an associated sensor array 130 (and coloring device 120, in the case of Fig. 1). However, the coloring system 100 and color detection system 500 can also be implemented on a

special purpose computer, a programmed micro-processor or micro-controller and peripheral integrated circuit element, an ASIC or other integrated circuit, a digital signal processor, a hard-wired electronic or logic circuit such as a discrete element circuit, a programmable logic device such as a PLD, PLA, FPGA, PAL, or the like. In general, any device capable of implementing a finite state machine that is in turn capable of implementing the flowcharts shown in Fig. 2-3 and 5, or appropriate portions thereof, can be used to implement the spectral curve reconstruction device according to this invention.

[0078] Furthermore, the disclosed methods may be readily implemented in software using object or object-oriented software development environments that provide portable source code that can be used on a variety of computer or workstation hardware platforms. Alternatively, appropriate portions of the disclosed coloring system 100 and the color detection system 500 may be implemented partially or fully in hardware using standard logic circuits or a VLSI design. Whether software or hardware is used to implement the systems in accordance with this invention is dependent on the speed and/or efficiency requirements of the system, the particular function, and the particular software or hardware systems or microprocessor or microcomputer systems being utilized. The processing systems and methods described above, however, can be readily implemented in hardware or software using any known or later developed systems or structures, devices and/or software by those skilled in the applicable art without undue experimentation from the functional description provided herein together with a general knowledge of the computer arts.

[0079] Moreover, the disclosed methods may be readily implemented as software executed on a programmed general purpose computer, a special purpose computer, a micro-processor, or the like. In this case, the methods and systems of this invention can be implemented as a routine embedded on a personal computer or as a resource residing on a server or workstation, such as a routine embedded in a photocopier, a color photocopier, a printer driver, a scanner, or the like. The systems and methods can also be implemented by physical incorporation into a software and/or hardware system, such as the hardware and software system of a photocopier or a dedicated image processing system.

[0080] While the invention has been described in conjunction with the specific embodiments described above, many equivalent alternatives, modifications

and variations may become apparent to those skilled in the art when given this disclosure. Accordingly, the exemplary embodiments of the invention as set forth above are considered to be illustrative and not limiting. Various changes to the described embodiments may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention.